Crisis Acres

Texts

A CRISIS OF ITS OWN MAKING

Cameron Kunzelman

Watching as an American, as I always must inevitably do, the thing that is most striking about *Crisis Acres* is how quickly it all falls into place. The patients plead in a patient way – the BBC export English stereotypes come running out; some of the doctors take on a sardonic wit, and those who do not pat themselves on the back for a job well done almost instantly; the administrators and healthcare trust become immediate worms dieting on power, apparently taking it as a given that their only job is to gleefully give orders and assure that nothing positive will be done. A theorization of social position and imagination – say, Goffman's masks or Jung's archetypes – doesn't take us far enough.

The megagame that we are let into over the course of *Crisis Acres* seems to be after something. People pretend to be patients, and they are routed through hospital services by people pretending to be all of the agents within a particular slice of the NHS. We see all of these people get managed. We see them provoked from outside, through political and media machinery, and we watch people attempt to cover over responsibilities like a cat in a litter box. All of these desires slam into each other, and we might call whatever it is a living creature, Frankenstein-like, that is summoned to preserve the living and speak in shame of the dead.

We might think about the game in terms of speculation. We're perhaps meant to speculate about what might have been. Had the rules been different, an infinite number of doctors could have been hired. Had the players been different, better solutions might have been reached. Had the dice rolled differently, no one would have been harmed at all. All of these fictional people might have lived in the kingdom of Heaven eternally, their dice always coming up correctly, their fictional diseases cured, their solutions and directions unerringly accurate. The golden game, played.

We have a hope that games and simulations might give us something. Ian Bogost famously has argued that if games make arguments, then they do it through metaphor. Things in the game stand in for things in the world we live in. Processes in the game stand in for processes in real life. When the dice roll to determine the diagnosis of a game patient, that replicates the real statistical likelihood that a symptom might be tracked back to a cause.

A game like the one captured in *Crisis Acres* has ideas that it might constrain speculation for a little while so that we might autopsy the medical establishment. Given the right parameters, knowing the conditions, we can trace the fail points in human systems to their thinnest, weakest links. Where process fails in the game, process fails in real life; the game makes the argument about how the real world operates. We speculate so that we can then tinker.

This fails to capture what happened in *Crisis Acres*. “We just wasted all our resources on him and he died,” a doctor says, clearly dejected at the gameplay outcome. “If you could close one department, which would you close?” an administrator yells down to the lowly staff below. The day is drawing to a close, and it’s clear that gameplay is getting thin. These people are throwing off the roles and doing something different. The ‘magic circle’ is an idea that games discourse is chained to like Prometheus to the rock – but here the idea’s usefulness wears thin if it was ever there at all. As Consalvo would have it, it was never there at all, and in this fictional hospital we watch it decay completely before being replaced by a more playful, less serious, tone that reveals an absurdity. James Hans would label this process production; these people are doing something above and beyond any kind of metaphoric operation from which they could learn anything. Knowing that there are no real lives on the line, that they are willingly entering said operation and soon to exit it anyway, the manic energy builds. They took on these roles so quickly, and for what? What was gained?

Some participants discuss the outcomes. They think that, were this the real world, they would have killed ten people that day. “That’s not good, is it?” one says. “It’s not good. Nothing’s good,” another responds.

When a game is played, it is always pushing on our capacity to extrapolate and speculate. Given X conditions and Y interactions, what might we predict could happen? Given a set of conditions, what other possible worlds might emerge? “Crisis Acres” suggests a deeply sceptical playing population when it comes to the medical world. The healthcare trust wants to spend their money, and they cannot, so the hospital’s operating costs are inevitably cut. Everyone shrugs their shoulders. A patient dies, everyone covers the best they can, and they attempt to name a new facility in honor of the dead. A vast puppetry complex of pre-patterned possibility.

It is fitting that the film begins with rationalization and pictures. Various people involved in the game attempt to schematize the operations of a hospital into the image of a body. They position patients as the heart of the bodies, administrators and directives in the head, the operators in the bowels, taxation at the feet. These people create an ad hoc Hobbesian Leviathan in order to try to image the hospital. And when push comes to shove, when people are trying to understand why someone died, the head denies all knowledge. If the patient is the heart, then the whole thing died. It paints a bleak picture.

The lesson of *Crisis Acres* might be one of receding thought: the more you make of the game, the less the game can do. The more the game makes sense, the less it works. The more rational the operation, the more players might divest. The serious game goes seriously awry. I am easily struck by images, and I left *Crisis Acres* haunted not by fluttering paper, but by people smiling. The players shake hands. They drink soda. They gesture. They live. They're done with the thing, and they're back to their own lives – the game abandoned and cast off easier than it was taken on. There's been discussion of games as rituals for as long as people have written about games, and a ritual is sometimes a way of dispelling. And what was dispelled?

Additional Context For Mentioned Works:
Ian Bogost - *Persuasive Games*
Mia Consalvo - *"There Is No Magic Circle"*
Erving Goffman - *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*
James S. Hans - *The Play of the World*
Thomas Hobbes - *Leviathan*
Carl Jung - *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

Cameron Kunzelman is a writer, critic, scholar and broadcaster whose work covers games studies, media theory and critical analysis. He is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and Theatre at Mercer University, Macon, the author of The World Is Born From Zero: Understanding Speculation and Videogames *and* Everything is Permitted: On Assassin's Creed*, and the co-host of* Games Studies Study Buddies*, a podcast on academic games studies.*

TOTAL PROCESS

Dudley Dream Walsh

Dudley Dream Walsh is an artist and writer who has worked with Wysing Arts Centre, Museum of Justice, Mayday Rooms, Abolitionist Futures, London Conference of Critical Thought, CCA Derry. His most recent book is I've had every deranged thought about _____*, featuring CA Conrad, Uma Breakdown Penny Goring Nick Blinko and others.*

Love offness , Total process, Anomalous systems, No destiny, Just people playing along, Something vaguely wrong, Its a choice to participate, NHS waiting lists, It just goes on and on, Transition is leaving the simulation.
Fountain of luxury
Toeing the line.
Everything is neutral
Jim Carey says he doesn't exist

uneven distributions

Feelings = dreams

Process or brilliance

Many words for nature- neurytality,
And many words for un-nature- simulation transsexual machine

STATUS QUO

is performance but its also real

It was a time of anomalous phenomena
The false objectivity fell apart
People made stories about the reason for the anomalies IT
It seemed so personal
Others resisted the anomalies because they liked the game
But what happen when the game gets deadly
What happed when someone dies because you don't a bad performance?

I like to cross my legs the natural way I dont like
And brush my teeth with the wrong hand WAY
I like the anomalies because I hate habits
The thing between the two things
But anomalies can be deadly
Habit is the opposite of anomaly
Habit can be deadly

because my habits nearly killed me.

I like an anomaly. I like to change something just after I got comfortable with it

The game seems natural
You can't tell if its real or not ?
The glitch between real and not real
Half real? Double real ?

Everything changes but we think it do not.

If you don't follow the rules it spoils it for everyone else
People become characters but also not
Wise guy says there is a way out

He replied we are in a simulation because he is always trying to make things seem natural that aren't
We call it getting clocked

HIS JOB IS

When Jim Carey realised his life was a performance he thought he was enlighten and then he played Dr Robotnic

JIM CARY
COINCIDENCE?

Is not being able to imitate (or being allowed to immigrate) what makes something nature ? Is that what makes something have value?
Trying to understand the rules so much you don't get a chance to think about how you'll participate

imitate
A BAD DEFINITION OF IMITATION = NOT ABLE 2 IMITATE
NOT ALLOWED TO

If you want to not argue about reality they first you need to know what it is
And if you want to argue about reality the easier was is to not know what it is

Don't make me argue with the pettiest people in England
Don't make me play that game

One bad definition of truth is when you play the game well
One bad conclusion is that your enlightened + this is a simulation
One bad definition of nature is it can't be copied by humans
One bad conclusion is that you get to be somebody
They should call that cultural Darwinism if we are cultural Marxism

anomalies

The analogies seemed to produce - the gratiouatious feeling of production that makes humans feel full, alive abundant and safe. but all they do is drain

enterprise
OTHERS
TO SOME

. What if you are forced to live in the anomie. Falling down the transcendental staircase forever.

What if its anomalies all the way down?

MAKE TEST JKS
CHROMAZOMES NOW!

In the system with people the anomalies have feelings

Written in response to the film *Crisis Acres* (2025),
by Tom K Kemp, exhibited at Two Queens, Leicester